

*The Friulian Language*

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This book brings together a collection of studies which relate in different ways to Friulian, a language of north-eastern Italy. It approaches the construction, expression, and maintenance of Friulian identity from the cross-disciplinary perspectives of social and political history, law, literature, and migration studies. It is the first such overview in English.

Many of the themes discussed in the volume are rooted in sociolinguistics, and there is an ongoing debate here about Friulian's existence as a dialect or a language. Mucignat agrees with Hudson's (2001) contention that the difference between the two – here as elsewhere – is one of social prestige. A language is broadly recognised as such by force of popularity and official recognition, whereas a dialect has a less obvious and less established identity. Whilst the editor admits that both terms are used throughout the book, at times their differentiation – and perhaps even their mutual relevance – remain indistinct.

Salimbeni presents a broad overview of the Friuli space, a useful introduction for the reader who may not be familiar with the context. The brevity of the chapter is inadequate to describe the periods from pre-Roman times to the present in any great detail, although the author does manage to avoid the simplistic and anecdotal, and provides useful references for further reading. Salimbeni highlights two points that resonate with discussions in other chapters: the evolution of Friulian on the basis of its German, Latin, and Slavic roots, and how this process has played out in the geography of the territory – in the centre of Europe, but on the periphery of Italy. Chapter 2 develops this dichotomy further, emphasising the role of the state in the standing of Friulian as one of Italy's regional languages. Cisilino's structured breakdown of language management is informed by his experiences as a policy-maker, and he argues that allusions to the status of Friulian before 1996 were in fact 'incidental', and that it was not until State Law n. 482 (1999) and Regional Law n. 29 (2007) that explicit protection was assigned to Friulian. Cisilino's claim that the increasingly

prescriptive nature of these policies has increased the presence and status of the language is persuasive; it is, however, regrettable that he does not offer a deeper analysis of why UNESCO still considers Friulian to be endangered – despite, that is, the support that it has in education, television, and other media.

Part 2 focuses on the linguistics, lexicon, and the feminine gender in historical and contemporary Friulian. The theme of centrality/peripherality once again emerges in Benicà's contribution, in which she argues that the language is 'internally united without being isolated' from the more powerful linguistic forces surrounding it. The many examples illustrate well the variation within Friulian, but the reader will note that the semantic question of language/dialect is again problematic here, in large part because the use of 'variety', 'dialect', and 'Friulian' is inconsistent throughout. The analysis of these varieties as a collective part of the broader 'northern Romance continuum' is nonetheless useful, situating them effectively in relation to neighbouring linguistic systems in Italy and beyond.

Marcato further strengthens this position in Chapter 4 by discussing the relationship between Friulian's Latin roots and the social and human developments that have shaped the language. The examination of the geolinguistic maps of the *Atlante storico-linguistico-etnografico friulano* is useful in demonstrating inter-variation within the Friulian territory; the reader should note, however, that the conclusions are based on data over fifty years old. The following analysis of a more recent Italian-Friulian dictionary is interesting, though a weakness might be detected in the assumption that English borrowings are 'vehiculed' by Italian (62). It might be argued, on the contrary, that Friulian's willingness to borrow from English is a characteristic it shares with Italian. Whilst 'mountain bike' may be more established in Italian than in Friulian, it is a contradictory position that 'patria' be then described as one of the most important Friulian lexemes, since this appears to dismiss the possibility that it too may be transported via Italian. Dictionaries are again the focus in Chapter 5, in which Fusco dismisses the 'backwards-looking' (70) historical approach to gender linguistics, and applies contemporary discussions and theories about the so-called 'female language' to the study of Friulian. She examines two dictionaries, published in 1992 and 2011, and compares the metadata (proverbs and example phrases) in their entries for 'man' and 'woman'. Though English translations are lacking in places, the analysis is compelling and supports Fusco's hypothesis that the study of dictionaries can be beneficial for tracing the solidification of gender stereotypes in language.

Part 3 of the collection contains three chapters dedicated to the out-migration of Friulian speakers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Finco examines what may be described as the pidginisation of Friulian in South America, as the language varieties of the new arrivals came into contact, hybridised, assimilated with other migrant languages and Spanish – and eventually solidified into codes that were in some cases passed on through several generations. The contemporary interview data is qualitative, though Finco is still able to trace morpho-syntactical influences of Friulian in the Spanish varieties spoken in several towns and cities in Argentina.

Diaspora is also a central theme in Grossutti's historical overview of Friulian migration to London, which focuses specifically on the terrazzo companies that formed in the second half of the nineteenth century. It is an interesting observation that, despite the prestige attracted by some of the grand mosaic works executed by the Friulian artisans, local stereotypes of Italians remained based on those who worked as street peddlers and in the catering trade. The chapter chronologises the immigrants' establishment and dissolution of several trade unions, and the damaging effects on the terrazzo industry of the World Wars and the ensuing economic crises. This provides an appropriate link to Pugliese's discussion, in Chapter 8, on the terrazzo and mosaic trade in twentieth-century Canada. As outlined by Grossutti, the industrialisation of the discipline meant that, by this stage, many works were being carried out by large organisations, in which Friulian roots were harder to trace. However, Pugliese embarks on an intriguing investigation of photographs, interviews and local newspaper stories to uncover the identities of Friulian craftsmen involved in two vast projects carried out in the Royal Ontario Museum (1933) and the Thomas Foster Memorial Temple (1936). The overview then moves through the decades to the present, in which the settings for mosaics have shifted from religious institutions to educational buildings, hospitals, companies, and private homes. The account is detailed, though the limited references to Friulian are increasingly anecdotal, as workers from other regions (Venice, in particular) are grouped with the terrazzo workers discussed at the outset.

The final part of the book provides a literary perspective on Friulian, in which Mucignat concentrates on aspects of language and style in Pasolini's *Il sogno di una cosa*, and comments on the novel's relevance to contemporary political debates in the Friulian context. Pasolini is a divisive figure for supporters of Friulian, as Pellegrini outlines in the final chapter of the book: his position that the language should remain an unstandardised

idiolect, broadly restricted to symbolism and poetry, invites assumptions that his work is not the most obvious example of language activism. Moreover, the self-translation into Italian of the three Friulian authors discussed by Pellegrini can be said to illustrate the comparatively weak position of the regional language in a period when the national code enjoys a much larger readership. Nevertheless, the strength of Friulian as an ‘interior language’ (183) – here again we confront the comparison of the centre and the periphery – is further supported by Mucignat, who argues that Pasolini’s *villotte* songs embody the resurgence of Friulian and its power over Italian in certain contexts. A particular strength of Mucignat’s work is that she analyses both the text itself and Pasolini’s own commentaries on it, from which she can with confidence draw out sections of the novel and scrutinise them according to the author’s epigraphs.

Overall, this book opens an expansive vista into the historical and contemporary status of Friulian, and its chapters are drawn together with nuanced editing and an excellent editorial introduction. Whilst the thematic scope of the volume may be considered its primary weakness – some chapters drift from the titular focus on the Friulian language, and others confuse the terminology used to describe it – the book remains an important contribution to the small canon of research on Friulian. It will motivate many readers to discover more about this obscure and interesting minority language, its themes, expressions and representations.

### Reference

Hudson, R. A. (2001). *Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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